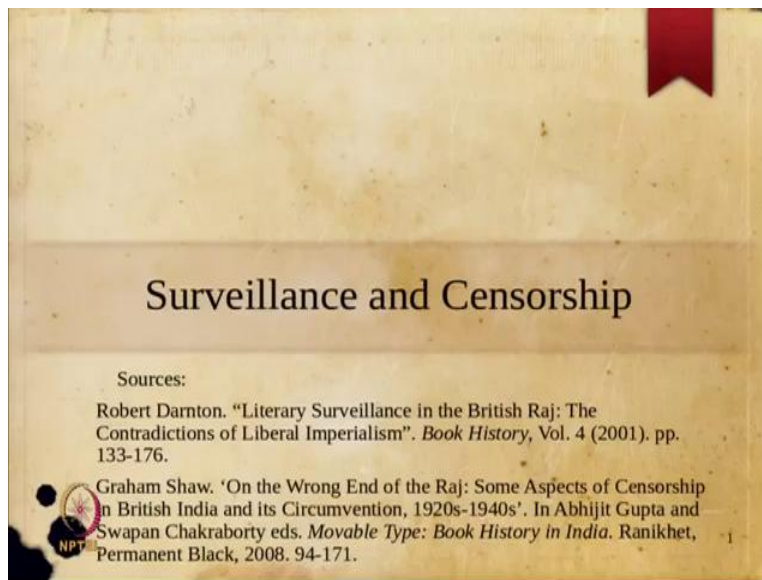


**Text, Textuality and Digital Media**  
**Professor Arjun Ghosh**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
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**Lecture 17**  
**Surveillance and Censorship**

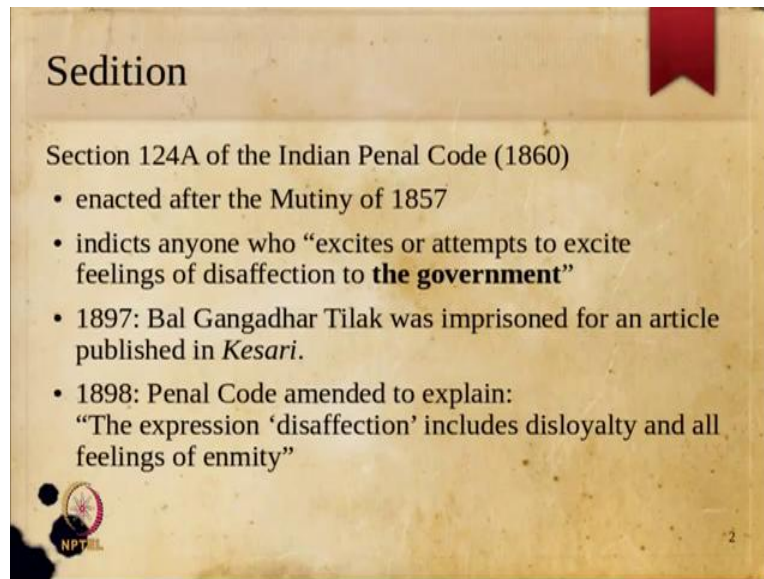
As the printing scene starts getting invigorated, more and more books get printed by the middle of the 19th century, the British start feeling the need for getting a feel of what is the discussion, what kind of emotions, what kind of ideas are in circulation through the print that is being undertaken by the Indians and in the Indian languages so they start the record keeping exercise.

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But what we want to look at today is the movement towards surveillance and censorship in colonial India and that the exact movement towards censorship takes more time but initially what happens is that they keep record of the books, maintain a detailed record cataloguing of the books, submission through the registration process with the incentive of copyright.

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But what we, before we begin on this discussion on surveillance and censorship we must look at closely at an idea that is going to enable the colonial state to justify censorship and that is the idea of sedition. The origin of the idea of sedition emerges from the Indian Penal Code. Indian Penal Code which was written, which was enacted after the Mutiny of 1857 looked to put certain, and certainly this was the time when the crown had taken over, so these laws were getting enacted by the British parliament for India.

And within the Indian penal code there is a section which defines sedition and this code is going to be applicable to anyone who excites or attempts to excite the feelings of disaffection to the government. Now, as you can see this is pretty vague, I mean these words define nothing which action is taken to be bad, which encourages feeling of disaffection and what is disaffection is pretty ambiguous in this statement.

It becomes pretty easy for the colonial government to frame whatever they want to , whoever they want to take action against, they can pretty much do so because of the vagueness in the language which is there. In 1897 under this act, under this particular section Bal Gangadhar Tilak was in prison for an article which was published in the journal that he used to look after and that is *Kesari*.

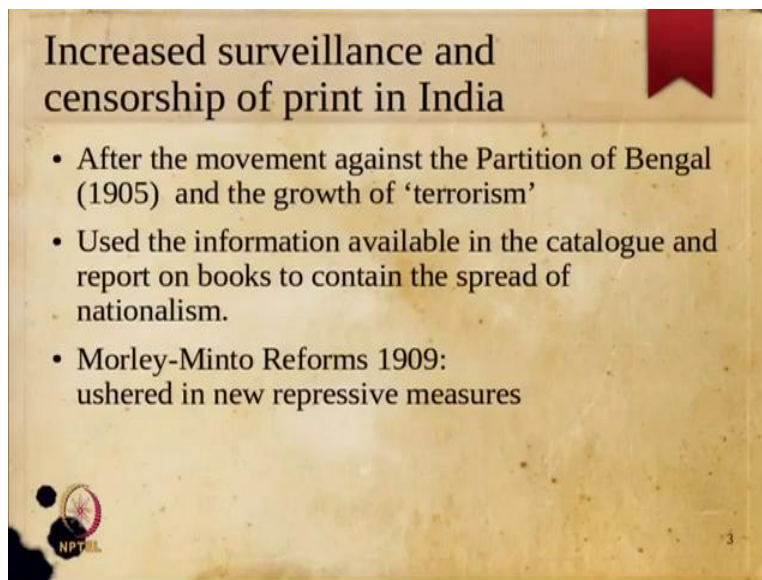
He was not the author of that article but because he was the publisher he was in prison. Right after that the penal code was amended with the purpose to actually explain what disaffection can

actually mean and it says that the expression disaffection includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity. Now again the explanation is also extremely vague. And, so therefore it becomes an all encompassing, a kind of draconian law under which people can easily be prosecuted and censorship can be imposed.

Now what we need to understand here is one fine point and that is, that when we look at the word government that anyone who excites or attempts to excite feelings of disaffection towards the government which is the government that we are talking about. We are talking about the, we are talking about a colonial government. Now we do understand that this is not a government of the people, by the people, for the people, this is not a democratic government.

And this is a government which is imposed which is a colonial imposition, within the colonial framework the people of India were not citizens but they were subjects and the British were the masters or the rulers of this country. So when you say this, the term government within this particular section, it is very different from that of a democratic government. This kind of a draconian law which has been enacted, which was a colonial era law can only be explained from the fact that the relationship between the government of the people was not a democratic one.

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**Increased surveillance and censorship of print in India**

- After the movement against the Partition of Bengal (1905) and the growth of 'terrorism'
- Used the information available in the catalogue and report on books to contain the spread of nationalism.
- Morley-Minto Reforms 1909: ushered in new repressive measures

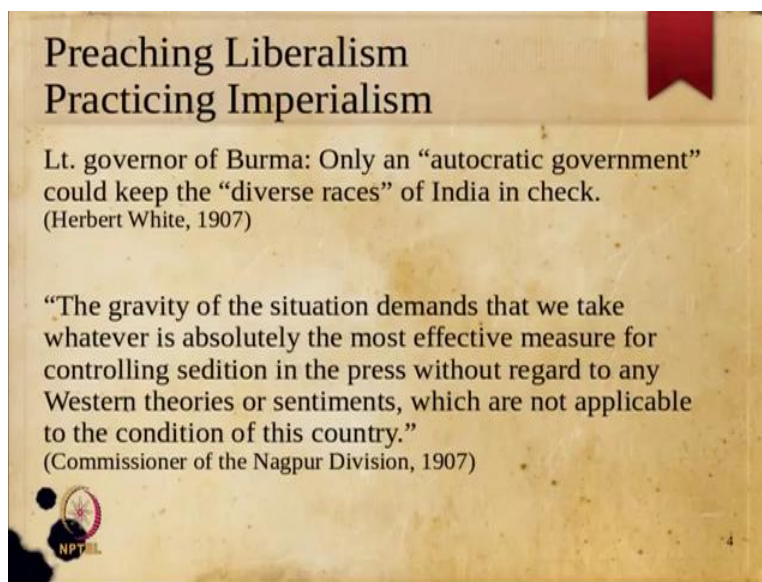
Anyways so what happens after that is that record keeping continues though and censorship really takes route after the movement against the partition of Bengal and the growth of terrorism in Bengal, so the British suggested the administrative move to divide Bengal. Bengal was a very

large province, one would say, administratively argue that it is difficult to administer such a large province and because of the growth of nationalism it also became more difficult to police for the British.

So they wanted to divide Bengal but the way they divided it, the way they wanted to divide it, they wanted to divide it in a manner in which the Muslim majority provinces fall into one particular sub province and the other one fell into West Bengal which is the Hindu majority provinces so there was fear of a communal polarization. That the British were trying to divide people on the basis of religious identities and there was a movement against it. Many writers and artists also participated against this movement and the British had to ultimately withdraw and they ultimately decided to shift the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911.

But it was at this point that the British realized, they took the decision to actually impose a greater degree of censorship. But even before this period, they used the information available in the catalogues and the reports the Bengal library catalogues to get a view, get a perception of what kind of feelings, nationalist feelings that could be there. And however it was after the partition of Bengal that the Morley-Minto reforms in 1909 actually ushered a few legal repressive measures.

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What we find is that there was an increasing feeling among the administrators of British India that democracy and liberty are sentiments which will not allow the colonial government to

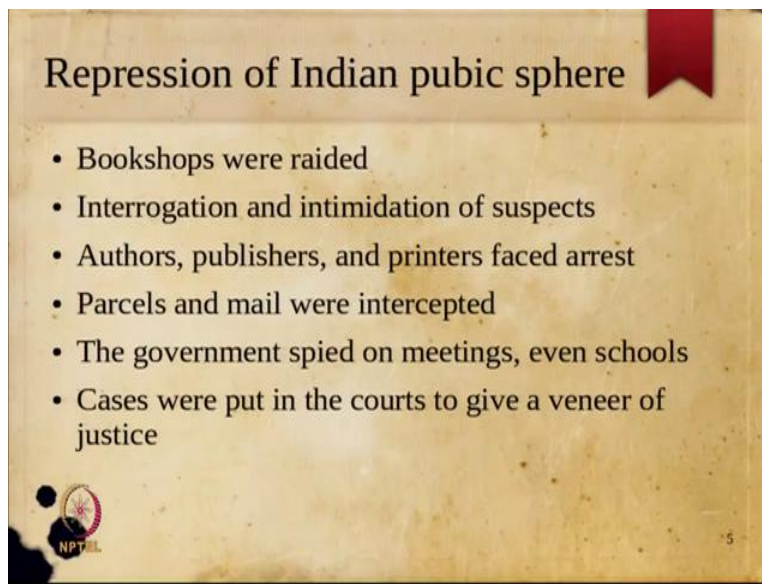
continue, to be able to live at peace. So, for example, Herbert White wrote in an official communication, he expressed the opinion in 1907 that only an autocratic government could keep the diverse races of India in check.

Remember Burma at that point of time was administered as part of British India and so this idea that the British had to mask their liberal face cannot, the mask will have to come off. The liberal mask of the British will have to come off if they have to keep the diversity of a land like India in check. Then there is another communication in 1907 from Nagpur.

Since the gravity of the situation demands that we take whatever is absolutely the most effective measure for controlling sedition in the press without regard to any western theories or of sentiments which are not applicable to the condition of this country. What is the condition of this country? That there are people who are thinking about freedom, there are diverse sets of people, who are uniting and trying to take on the British administration now, the feelings of disaffection against the colonial government are growing.

And what are these western theories or sentiments that they are talking about? This is that dose of liberty and democracy that which the British preached as that which brings the great light of the western civilization and that had to be abandoned within the colonial situation. So, imperialism could not go hand in hand with liberal ideas.

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Repression of Indian public sphere

- Bookshops were raided
- Interrogation and intimidation of suspects
- Authors, publishers, and printers faced arrest
- Parcels and mail were intercepted
- The government spied on meetings, even schools
- Cases were put in the courts to give a veneer of justice

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So this process of repression within the Indian public sphere begins, book shops were raided and people, authors and printers, book sellers would be interrogated, intimidated, they would be put behind bars. Authors, publishers, printers they had to face arrest. There would be, mail would be intercepted and mostly in those days this was many-many years before the coming of direct home delivery services but even in those days books would be transported by mail.

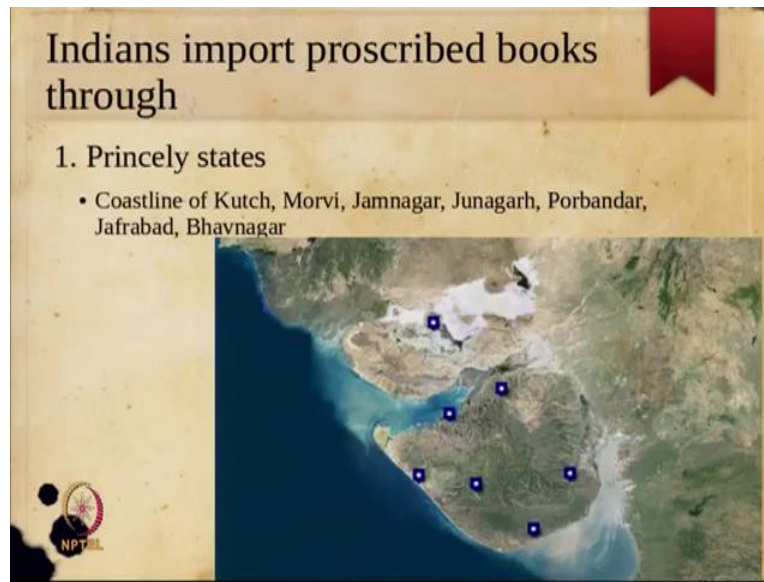
Book shops would acquire books from abroad by mail and therefore, there would be an increased surveillance here to check what kind of books are getting transported because do understand that the British government was suspicious of ideas that are coming in from abroad. I would like to remind you of the situation in Europe. European governments too were extremely weary of material, printed material that would come in from outside their administrative territories.

Because they could try and control what kind of texts, what kind of books would get and pamphlets would get printed within their territory, but how do you control those ideas that are getting circulated from outside the borders and that is by policing the borders and mail and the parcels and the ports, the ships these were the places which actually enabled border crossing so one had to be. So this is where the British government played a very important role in intercepting the parcels and mails.

The government even spied on meetings, and even schools because young boys were getting enthused with nationalist ideas and they were taking up arms specially in Bengal, we all know of Khudiram Bose and his sacrifice for his people and cases were put up. However, on the other hand you had the British wanted to continue to maintain a veneer of liberalism, wanted to maintain a veneer of justice so cases would be put up in courts.

It was not without trial that people would be put into jail there would be a trial but we all know that these trials were really not very fair trials, in most of the cases the judges would already be the outcome would often be very biased, we know of cases where the way courts operated, it is mostly European judges who would if there is a case against Indian put in by the government the judge had to be an European and in such a situation the outcome was that which reeked of bias. And therefore this process of justice, this judicial process was merely a façade in most cases.

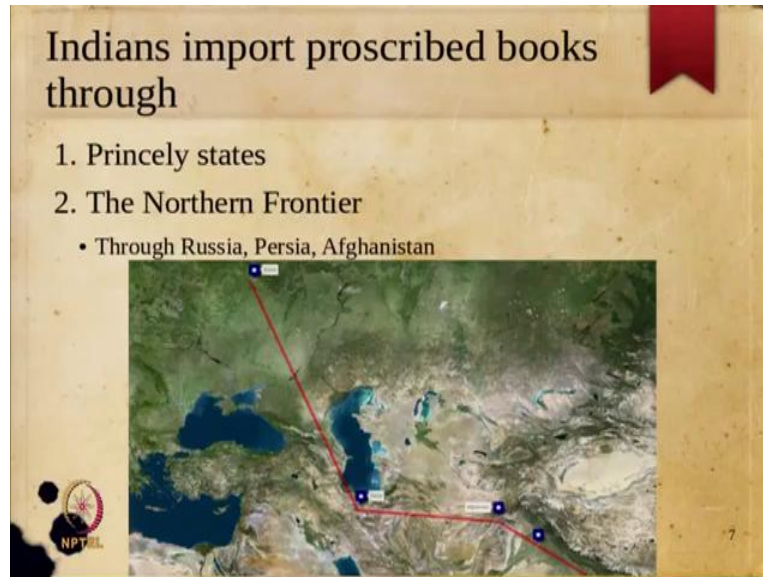
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However, the Indian nationalists found ways of circumventing these bans and import of proscribed books and one of the ways that was followed was import through princely states as you know the British India they had pockets of many princely states which notionally had their own administration and sovereignty over their politics and here is the coastline of present day Gujarat was a very important entry route from the west where ships and boats would be able to come in.

And there the border postings were not managed by the British but by the forces of these princely states, the states of Kutch, Morvi, Jamnagar, Junagarh, Porbandar Jafrabad and Bhavnagar. This became a very important route and then via land enter into the main land and into British India and go to the various towns and cities and get distributed, clandestinely in underground network.

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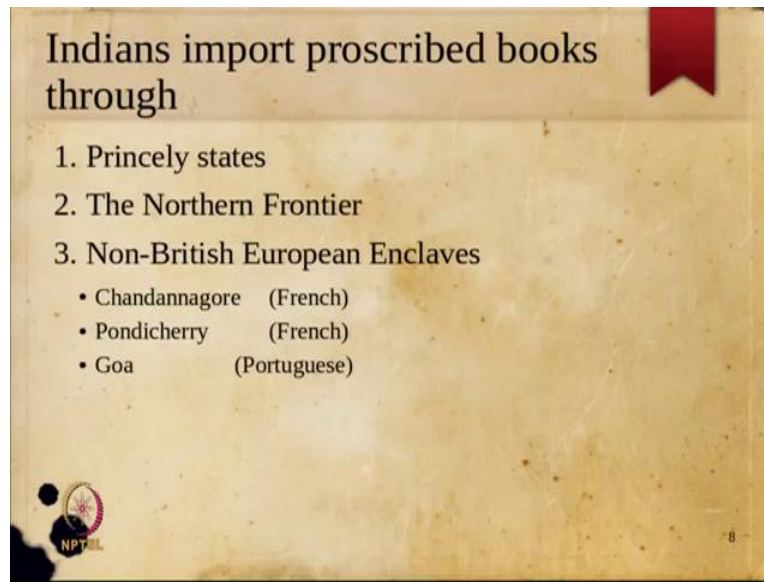
Indians also imported proscribed books through the northern frontier so the books would travel through Russia, through Persia that is present day Iran, through Afghanistan into India via land and that was another route through which books would come in and what I am discussing is really you understand that this went on for several decades from within the first half of the 20th century.

And please note that one of the places from where these books are originating is Russia and that is important because a large part of the British interest in proscribing books and controlling books and censoring books is to prevent communist literature from entering the country. The years following the Russian revolution that becomes a serious international concern within the British empire and the various European empires to contain the growth of communism.

Books from communism could emerge from anywhere, the British, the German, the Italian communist parties were also pretty large and they also could have been sources for books which were considered to be politically dangerous for the British empire and so in this particular case we see that Russia becomes an important source and the books move through the land route via past the Caspian sea through Iran or Persia and Afghanistan into the main land.



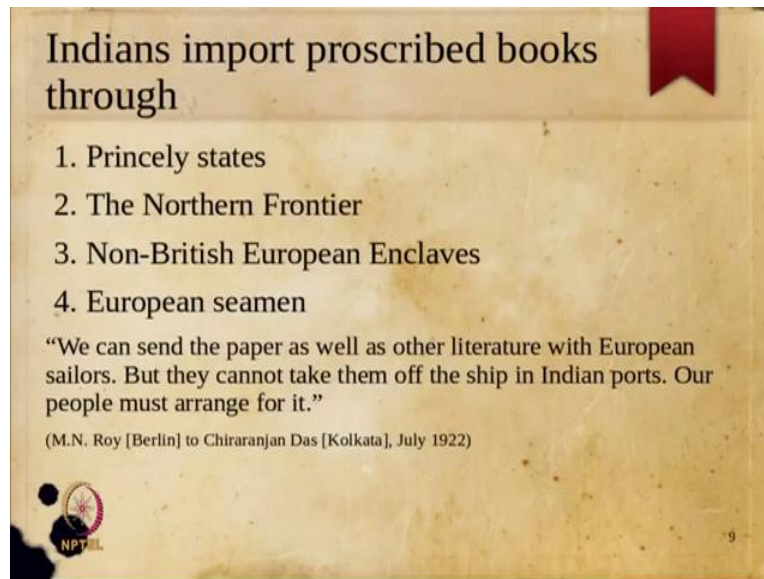
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The other route that could often be followed were the non-British enclaves, you know in the colonial times there were certain enclaves which were controlled within India, which were controlled by other European powers. Chandannagore was controlled by the French, Pondicherry was controlled by the French, Goa was controlled by the Portuguese and in these areas and these were very interesting specific cases.

We do not have too much time today to actually be able to look into the details of this but it tells you about the inter European rivalry that is there and the French would sometimes be happy to allow books which are considered seditious through their territory into mainland India and therefore, and these were cases of diplomatic negotiations, tough negotiations between two colonial powers.

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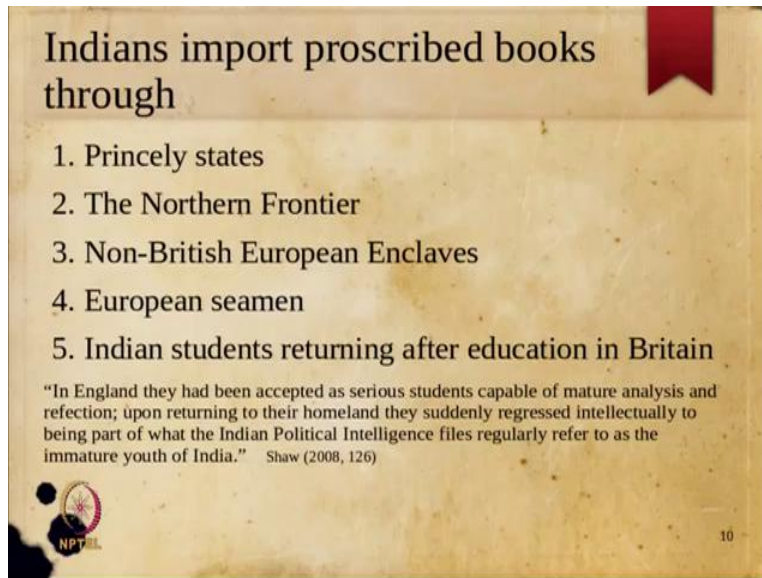
Indians also got in proscribed books through European seamen. People who, sailors who would come to the Indian ports would carry these and often these ships would originate from outside Britain from other European countries. So here is a communication made by M.N. Roy from Berlin to Chiraranjan Das in Kolkata in 1922. He says we can send the paper as well as other literature with European sailors but they cannot take them off the ship in Indian ports. Our people must arrange for it.

So the banned books can reach the ports but they cannot be taken off and they had to be clandestinely taken off by escaping the watchful eyes of the border police. One point that needs to be understood is what is the basis on which these books were proscribed, these books were often proscribed on the basis of the idea that works of certain authors would be proscribed or certain publishers would be on the banned list, on the watch list and you could not import those works.

It was very (19:31) there was not a clear idea, sometimes book sellers, book exporters from England would be at a loss as to whether or not to actually send the book because the way it would work is book shops in India would when they place an order that order would come by mail, the books would be sent by mail from Europe that is how the import of books operated and I am sure it operates in the same way today as well. And if there is no guarantee that a certain

books would be allowed into the country or not, this leaves the book trade in some sort of a dilemma.

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The other way in which books would enter the country would be Indian students after returning from education in Britain would bring along with them books that they (acquired?) during their studentship and would come back with it and sometimes these books would contain radical ideas, particularly communist, ideas about communism and they would be stopped when they land at an Indian port.

And this particular statement shows how by Graham Shaw shows how this was some kind of a dichotomy that in England these students were accepted as serious students capable of mature analysis and reflection but on returning to their homeland they suddenly regressed intellectually to being part of what the Indian political intelligence files regularly referred to as the immature youth of India, that is the way.

So whereas in England there exists a condition of liberty so these students who are engaging in ideas that are radical, are looked upon as mature students who were in serious analysis and contemplation and reflection. Because we do understand that academics is all about engaging with diverse ideas. Unless you engage with diverse ideas you cannot actually gather enough knowledge and experience to be able to take on the world which is new because the world is always coming anew and therefore in order to engage with the world you need newer ideas.

And newer ideas can only emerge if one throws oneself into conflicting ideas, into ideas that are new, ideas that are experimental that is what students are supposed to do, but if students are told that no you cannot engage in certain kinds of thoughts and processes then that will sort of bring a stasis to the process of knowledge creation, so whereas in England there is an atmosphere of democracy of liberty that looks to be a natural process which students go through, where they encounter with what could be dangerous ideas and understand for themselves that what is acceptable and what is not acceptable.

Whereas in India, within British India because there is no atmosphere of liberty this experimental thought processes are looked upon as dangerous and they are censored and they are held for a violation of law but this atmosphere of censorship is something that we can look upon as a 19th century colonial version of what was happening in Europe in the centuries immediately after the emergence of print.

Because print allows for as we have seen, print allows for the movement of ideas from one geography to another at a much greater speed, at a much greater scale than the oral or the manuscript universe and therefore, the law also deals with books in a high handed fashion what seems to be a more high handed fashion. And what we have seen is the way in which the advancement of technology really brings about the need for certain changes in law if the state power had to maintain itself and there are ways in which those laws are also circumvented and it becomes a cat and mouse game. Thank you.